TL 5644

INDONESIA: EAST TIMOR POLICY: PRESS RELEASE

FOLLOWING IS THE TEXT OF MR DOWNER'S PRESS RELEASE OF 12 JANUARY ANNOUNCING AUSTRALIA'S NEW POLICY APPROACH ON EAST TIMOR:

STARTS

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT HISTORIC POLICY SHIFT ON EAST TIMOR

THE RAPIDLY EVOLVING SITUATION IN INDONESIA AND ON THE GROUND IN EAST TIMOR DEMANDS A CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION OF THE FUTURE OF EAST TIMOR AND I AM PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE THAT, FOLLOWING A CAREFUL REVIEW OF OUR POLICY TOWARDS EAST TIMOR, THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTHAS DECIDED TO MAKE A SIGNIFICANT ADJUSTMENT TO THAT POLICY.

I AM OF THE VIEW THAT THE LONG-TERM PROSPECTS FOR RECONCILIATION IN EAST TIMOR WOULD BE BEST SERVED BY THE HOLDING OF AN ACT OF SELF-DETERMINATION AT SOME FUTURE TIME, FOLLOWING A SUBSTANTIAL PERIOD OF AUTONOMY.

IN THE MEANTIME THIS ADJUSTMENT TO AUSTRALIAN POLICY DOES NOT ALTER THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION WHICH CONTINUES TO RECOGNISE INDONESIAN SOVEREIGNTY OVER EAST TIMOR.

THE NATURE OF AN ARRANGEMENT FOR AUTONOMY AND THE FORM OF ANY ACT OF SELF DETERMINATION ARE ESSENTIALLY MATTERS FOR THE PARTIES INVOLVED, BUT AUSTRALIA CONTINUES TO URGE THAT THE EAST TIMORESE BE DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE CONSIDERATION OF THEIR FUTURE, IN ORDER FOR AN ATMOSPHERE OF TRUST TO DEVELOP. AUSTRALIA WOULD NATURALLY ACCEPT AN OUTCOME NEGOTIATED BETWEEN THE EAST TIMORESE AND JAKARTA.

THE PRIME MINISTER, MR HOWARD, HAS WRITTEN TO PRESIDENT HABIBIE ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT'S VIEWS ON THE FUTURE OF EAST TIMOR. THE INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT HAS SHOWN A LAUDABLE COMMITMENT TO FLEXIBILITY ON EAST TIMOR SINCE PRESIDENT HABIBIE ASSUMED OFFICE LAST YEAR AND HAS INDICATED THAT IT VALUED AUSTRALIA'S INTEREST IN A LONG TERM RESOLUTION OF THE EAST TIMOR PROBLEM.

WE HAVE ALSO URGED THE INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT TO ENGAGE EAST TIMORESE LEADERS INCLUDING XANANA GUSMAO IN THE PROCESS OF DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS. WHILE THE MECHANISM FOR XANANA'S INVOLVEMENT IS A MATTER FOR THE INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT, THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT BELIEVES HE HAS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS ON EAST TIMOR'S FUTURE AND WOULD SUPPORT HIS RELEASE IN ORDER TO TAKE PART IN THIS PROCESS.

ENDS